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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION AND GOVERNMENT MEMBERS VOICE CONCERN
OVER UPCOMING ELECTIONS AND NEED FOR OAS PRESENCE

REF: A. BOGOTA 5665 B. BOGOTA 5431 C. BOGOTA 2101

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (U) Summary: As the October 28 regional elections approach, concerns over the integrity of elections are surfacing. Opposition politicians and GOC officials voiced concern that paramilitaries, the FARC, ELN and narco-traffickers will affect the outcomes in certain regions. Opposition leaders also fear the elections may be marred by fraud and vote buying, especially in areas previously controlled by paramilitaries. The GOC is taking steps to ensure transparency and prevent illegal armed groups from influencing the results, but it is imperative the OAS deploy an observer mission with sufficient lead time to help guard against interference in the process. End Summary.

12. (U) In an interview on August 12 in "El Tiempo," Inspector General (Procurador) Edgardo Maya said there is no guarantee of transparency⁸ in the October elections. Maya highlighted the need for election reform, including an overhaul of the electoral system and electoral code. He said the current system creates opportunities for voter fraud, manipulation and intimidation, and suggested that in the long term Colombia should move to electronic voting. He said the OAS electoral observation mission would play an important role in averting fraud and intimidation, and suggested it be led by someone of high stature, such as ex-Chilean President Ricardo Lagos.

13. (U) Registrar Juan Carlos Galindo replied in an August 13 interview in El Tiempo that the GOC is doing everything it can to protect the integrity of the upcoming elections. He agreed with Maya on the need for further reforms and financial accountability, but explained the GOC is working with local authorities, the Colombian National Police, the Department of Administrative Security (DAS), and the military to ensure the October elections' integrity. Galindo noted the GOC had requested the OAS to observe the elections and would work closely with the group to address problems.

14. (U) President Uribe said the GOC continues to consolidate efforts to protect the integrity of elections. GOC civilian and security services are holding weekly meetings to ensure preparedness and transparency. In addition, the GOC has set up an inter-agency task force to respond to any problems that might arise during the election period. He called on all candidates to agree to a pact of transparency, stating that they owe it to the Colombian people. Governing coalition parties signed a transparency pact on March 27, but a proposed election reform package stalled in congress.

15. (C) Opposition Polo Democratico President Carlos Gaviria told us he supports GOC efforts to protect the integrity of

the elections and believes it is committed to achieving this goal. Polo Senator Gustavo Petro told us the GOC has made progress, but more needs to be done. He expressed concerns about voter fraud and vote buying. Petro said politicians jailed for paramilitary ties--such as former Sucre Senators "Gordo" Garcia and Jario Merlano--lost their muscle with the paramilitary demobilization, but continue to wield power through their control of local government machinery and access to narcotics money. Petro said it is key the OAS deploy a robust observation mission soon to make it more difficult for corrupt politicians to engage in fraud. Meanwhile, El Tiempo reported August 16 that the FARC has kidnapped three candidates in Antioquia Department over the last month.

Nichols